



PLAYING FOR KEEPS

Children & War in Africa



A Black & White Photographic Documentary



aROUND THE GLOBE TODAY, CHILDREN IN OVER 50 COUNTRIES ARE SUFFERING THE EFFECTS OF ARMED CONFLICT. It is estimated that over 300,000 child soldiers are currently engaged in active fighting.

The use of children as warriors is one of the 20th century's tragic legacies. The resolution to this problem has two elements: one, the political will to end the practice and two, the need to accelerate the release of children from armies and to facilitate their reintegration into families and communities.

Children who are the victims of trauma, violence, and involuntary participation in war are not the only ones who are directly affected. Essentially, all children living in conflict areas suffer from varying degrees of anxiety and emotional distress that, if not effectively addressed, can adversely affect them for the remainder of their lives.

For each child who is killed or injured by physical violence, gunfire, or land mines, many more are deprived of their basic physical, emotional, spiritual, and cultural needs. Millions of children have lost their parents, siblings, homes, education...their childhood. Girls especially are victimized in ways that can have life-long after-effects if timely, proper care and counseling are not provided.

Since 1989, USAID has given assistance to these children through the Displaced Children and Orphans Fund. With significant programs in seven countries, USAID has established a strong record of accomplishment. These child-based interventions are often the first development activities that take place in a country that is or has recently been affected by war. One important lesson that has been learned is that when appropriate steps are taken, most parties can reconcile their differences when the well-being of their children is at stake.

USAID'S PROGRAMS STRIVE TO ACHIEVE THE FOLLOWING:

- *Document, trace, and reunify children with families;*
- *Support psychosocial adjustment of children in distress;*
- *Facilitate reintegration of children into communities; and*
- *Support formal and informal educational opportunities.*

The pictures and stories that are included in ***Playing For Keeps*** represent the difference that appropriate interventions can make in the lives of children who have been exposed to the horrors of modern-day warfare in four African countries: Angola, Liberia, Mozambique, and Sierra Leone.

The photographs set in Angola and Sierra Leone depict children who are currently experiencing armed conflict in their countries. Liberia represents a country that, hopefully, is on the way back to peace and normalcy. And Mozambique represents a country that had experienced a successful termination of a conflict that had displaced tens of thousands of children, who were later helped by USAID programs.

To protect the identity of the children in this photographic documentary, we have used initials or changed their names.

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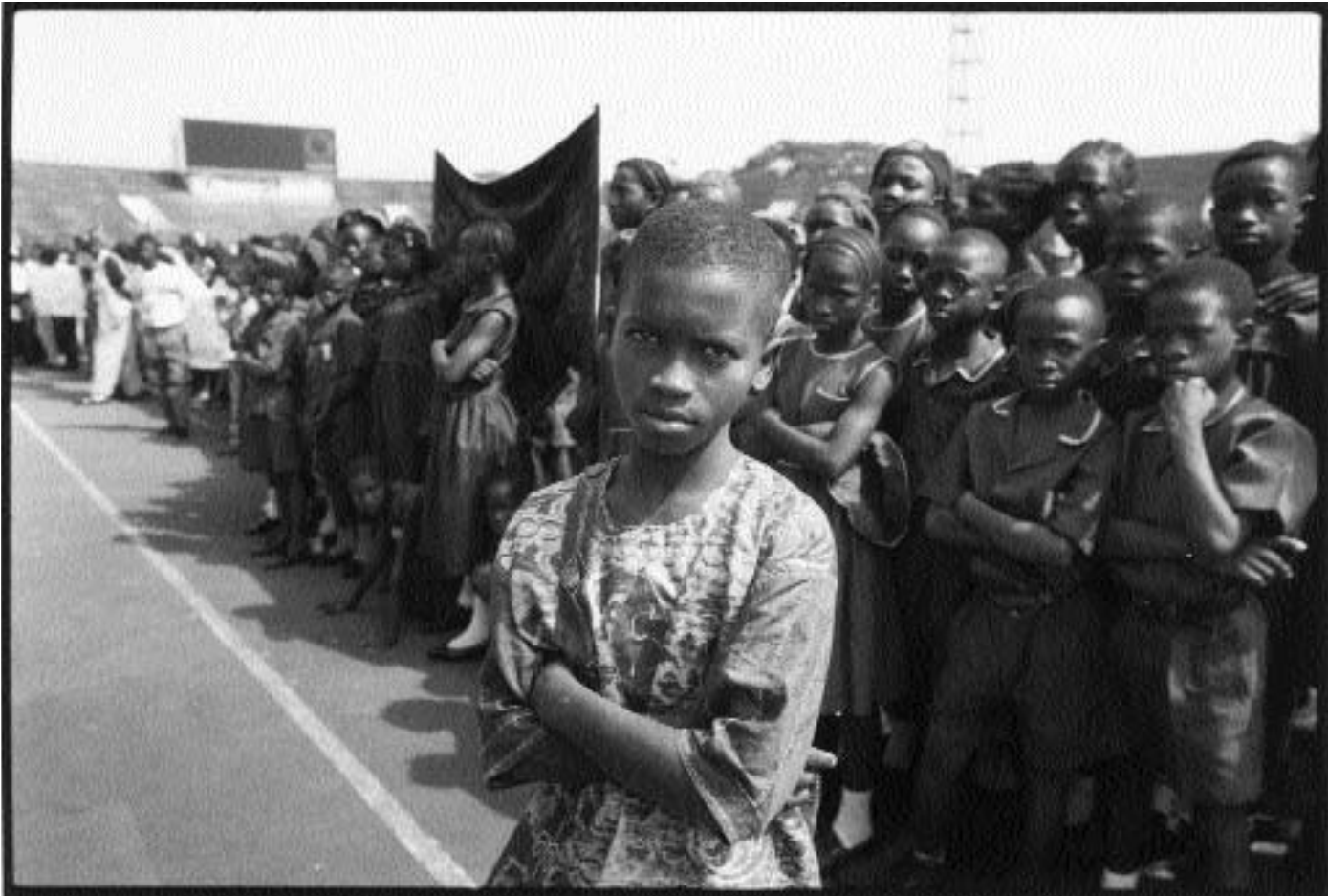
{ S i e r r a L e o n e }

Thousands of children have been killed or injured in the war in Sierra Leone. Many have lost hands or feet as the result of intentional mutilation. Approximately 3,700 children are separated from their families, and an additional — and perhaps larger — number of children are currently separated from their families and serving with the rebel or civilian defense forces. In 1997, at least half of the estimated 6,000 rebel soldiers were thought to be children.

The psychological impacts of war on former child soldiers are harder to detect, and potentially more debilitating, than physical trauma. The psychosocial impacts appear to be greatest when a child's experience undermines his or her social connections.

In Sierra Leone, USAID's Displaced Children and Orphans Fund strives to reunite and reintegrate 2,500 unaccompanied children with their families and communities. Toward that goal, USAID is funding the following activities:

- *Developing long-term arrangements for an estimated 500 unaccompanied children who cannot be reunified with their families and communities;*
- *Ensuring that unaccompanied and other vulnerable children have access to basic education, primary health care, and safe water;*
- *Strengthening the capacity of the Child Protection Network, which includes the government of Sierra Leone, local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international NGOs, and the United Nations Humanitarian Coordination Assistance Unit; and*
- *Producing a compendium of best practices on interim care, reunification, and reintegration of war-affected children.*



Twelve-year-old "S.K." can't remember how old he was when captured by Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels in his village of Bo. For several years, he was made to work as a scout for the rebels and to carry back looted items after raids on villages. Eventually, S.K. was caught near a checkpoint by ECOMOG (West African Peacekeeping Force) soldiers. His release was negotiated by an Italian priest, Father Berton, who founded a local NGO in Lakka Town, several miles south of Freetown. S.K. currently resides in a small group home along with approximately 45 other child ex-combatants.

This photograph was taken in the stadium where the parade to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the U.N.'s "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" ended. Ironically, within a matter of weeks after this celebration, the stadium was once again filled, this time with local Sierra Leoneans seeking refuge from the carnage that ensued after rebel forces entered the capital in January of this year.



Thirteen-year-old "A.A.J." believes he was 10 years old when he was captured by the RUF. He hasn't seen his parents since, but thinks he remembers what they look like. A.A.J. was made to work as an "aide-de-camp," doing domestic work. His release was negotiated by a local NGO, who is presently attempting to trace his parents to reunify him with his family, however, he doesn't know if they're still alive.

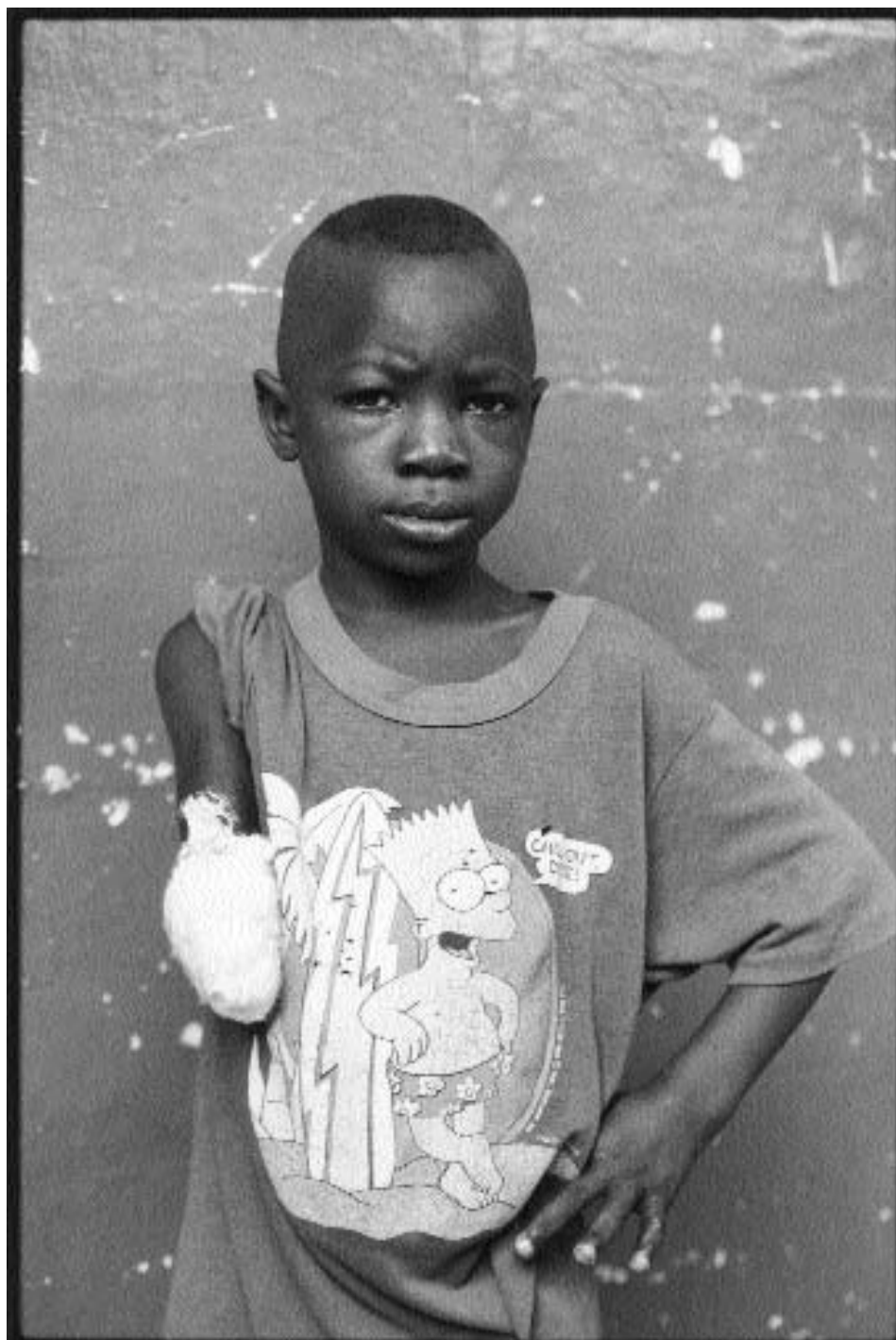


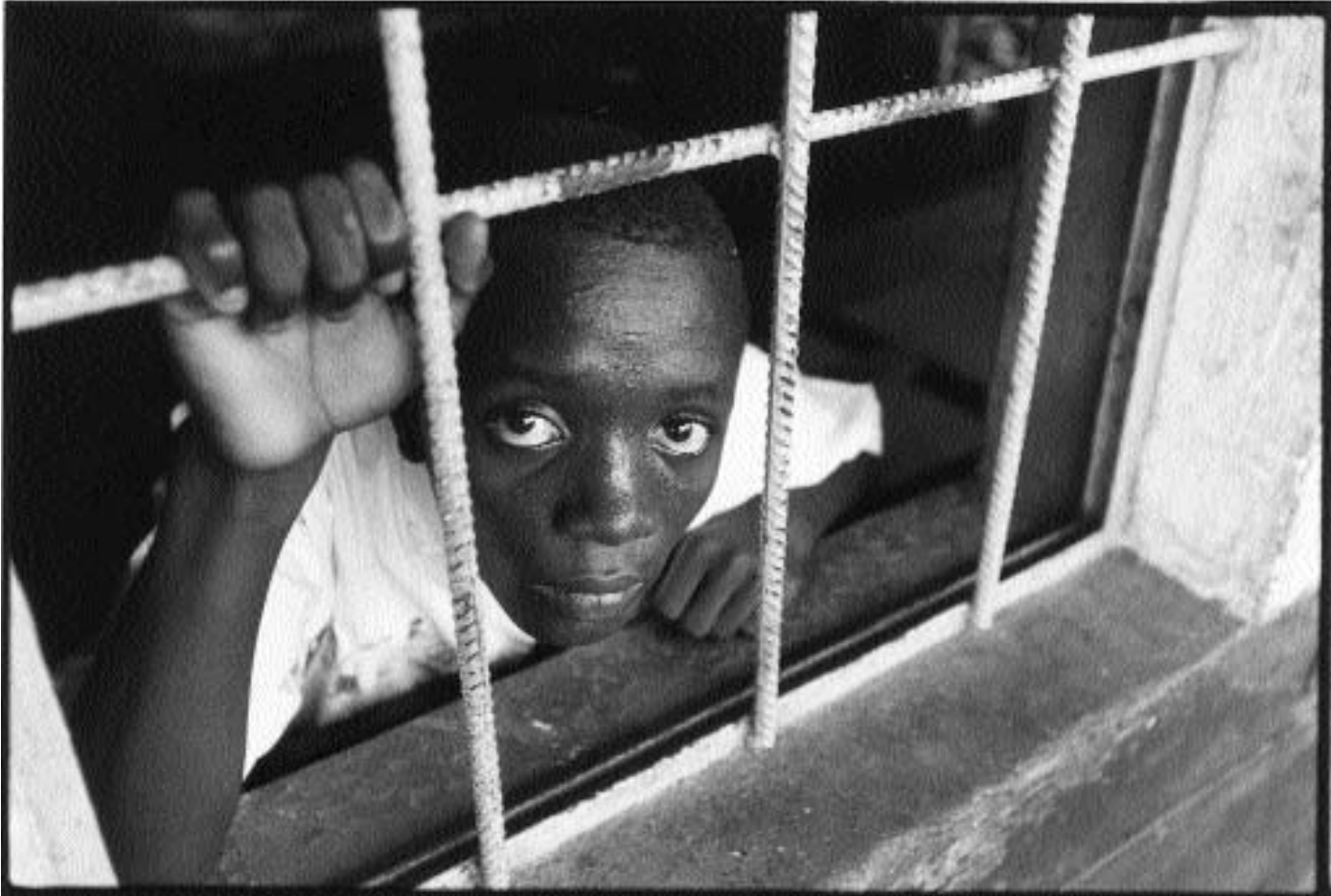
"These ones, be afraid of them; they are dangerous. They don't have anything...no second thoughts, no wife, no children. Don't play with them, theirs is to fight."

— Bystander's interruption during interview near checkpoint with Kamajohs

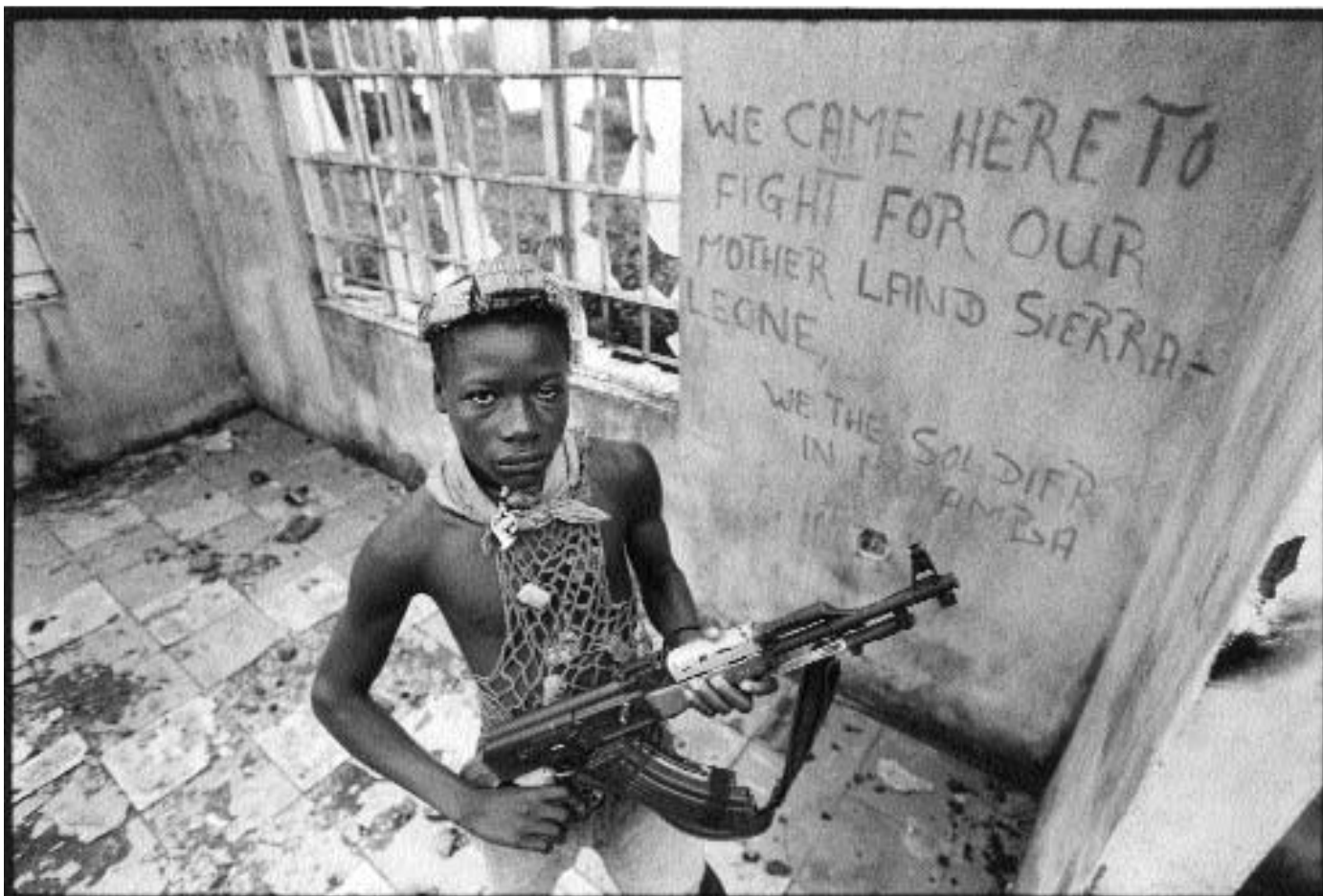
"A.K.," an 8-year-old "Kamajoh" with the Civil Defense Force in Moyamba, has been fighting since the age of 6. Kamajohs are traditional hunters of the Mende tribe who volunteer their service in defending their villages against rebel forces. After going through an initiation ceremony, Kamajohs believe they possess magical powers that deflect enemy bullets.

Connaught Hospital, Freetown: 7-year
old victim of amputation by RUF
rebels.

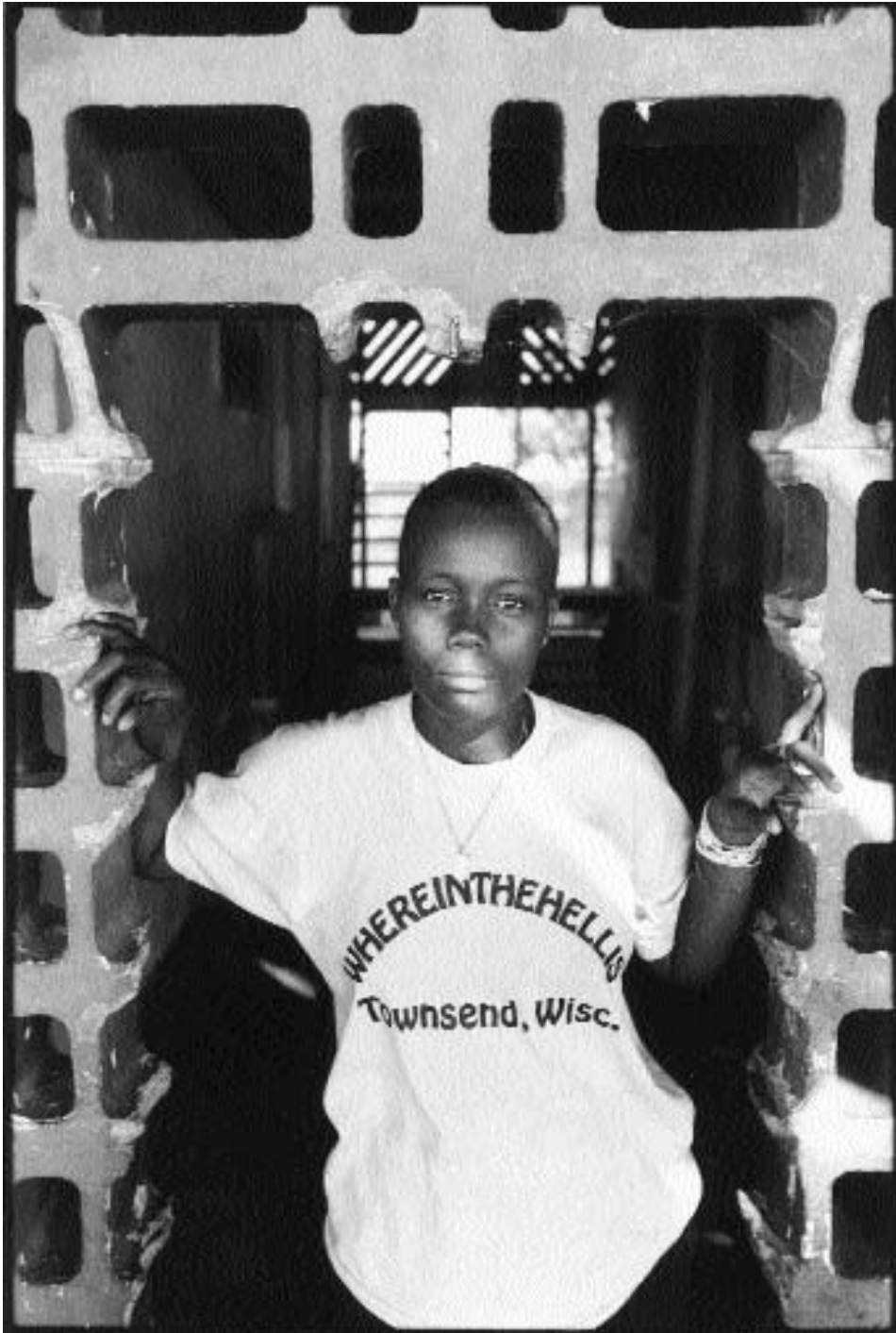




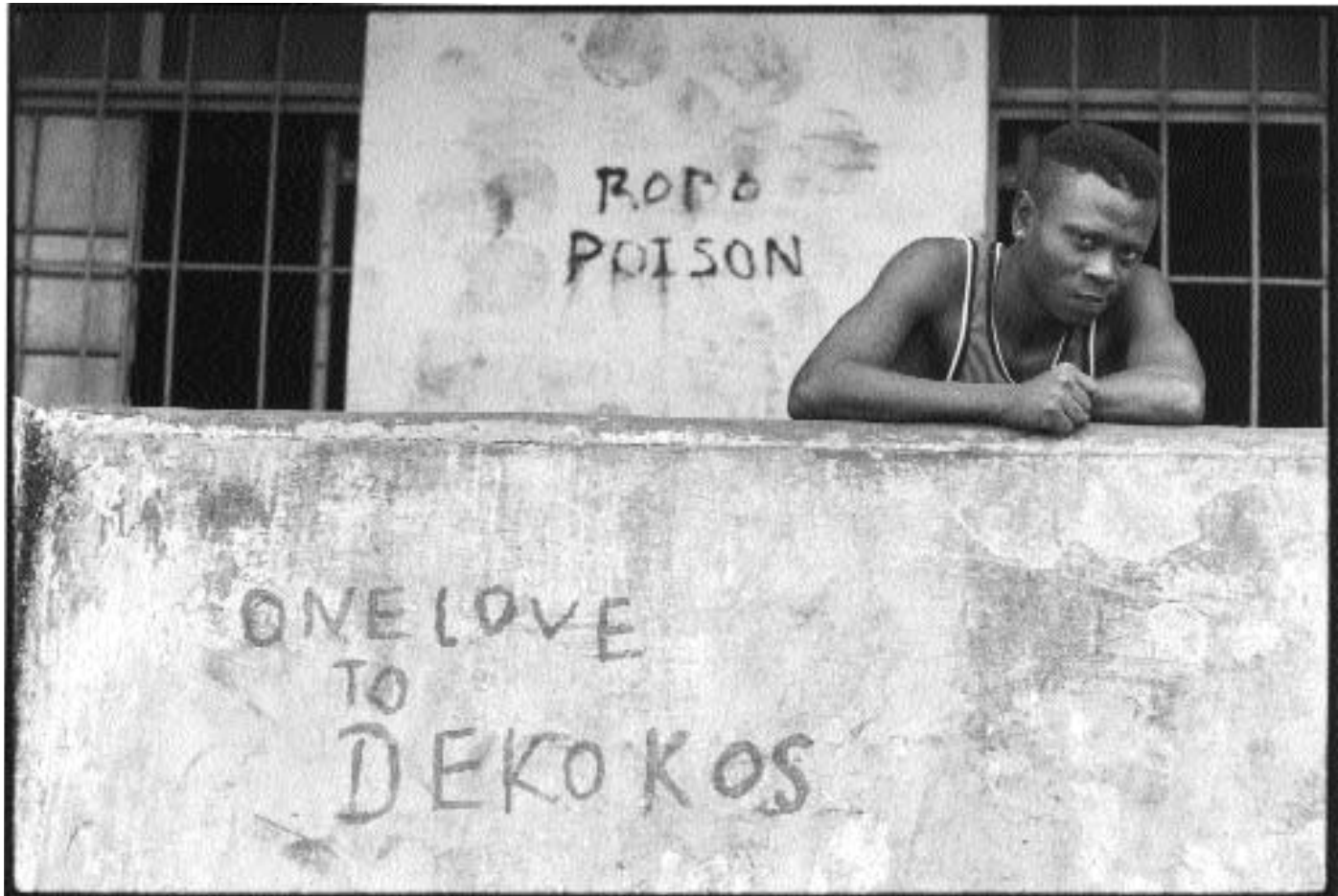
"T.S." is 12 years old and he started fighting in 1992 after rebels raided his village, killed both his parents and abducted him. At that time, the rebels told him that his "new job was to fight for freedom in Sierra Leone." Typically, they would carry out attacks at daybreak. "The big man" (unit commander) would inject the younger boys with cocaine or have them ingest gunpowder, which also acts as a stimulant, before such raids. T.S. admitted that he "killed so many, mostly soldiers" and specifically recalls that he raided a total of 29 villages along the Liberian border. After the raids, which often lasted an entire day, they were given "blue boats," a narcotic that would make them sleep for many hours. During the period that the rebels were in control, T.S. left his faction and found his way to a safehouse for ex-combatants. However, because he suffered from nightmares and was "urinating the bed," other ex-combatants teased and beat him, so he left and joined rebel forces again. This happened twice before he returned and signed an agreement to never again take up arms. T.S. wants to learn any trade that he can.



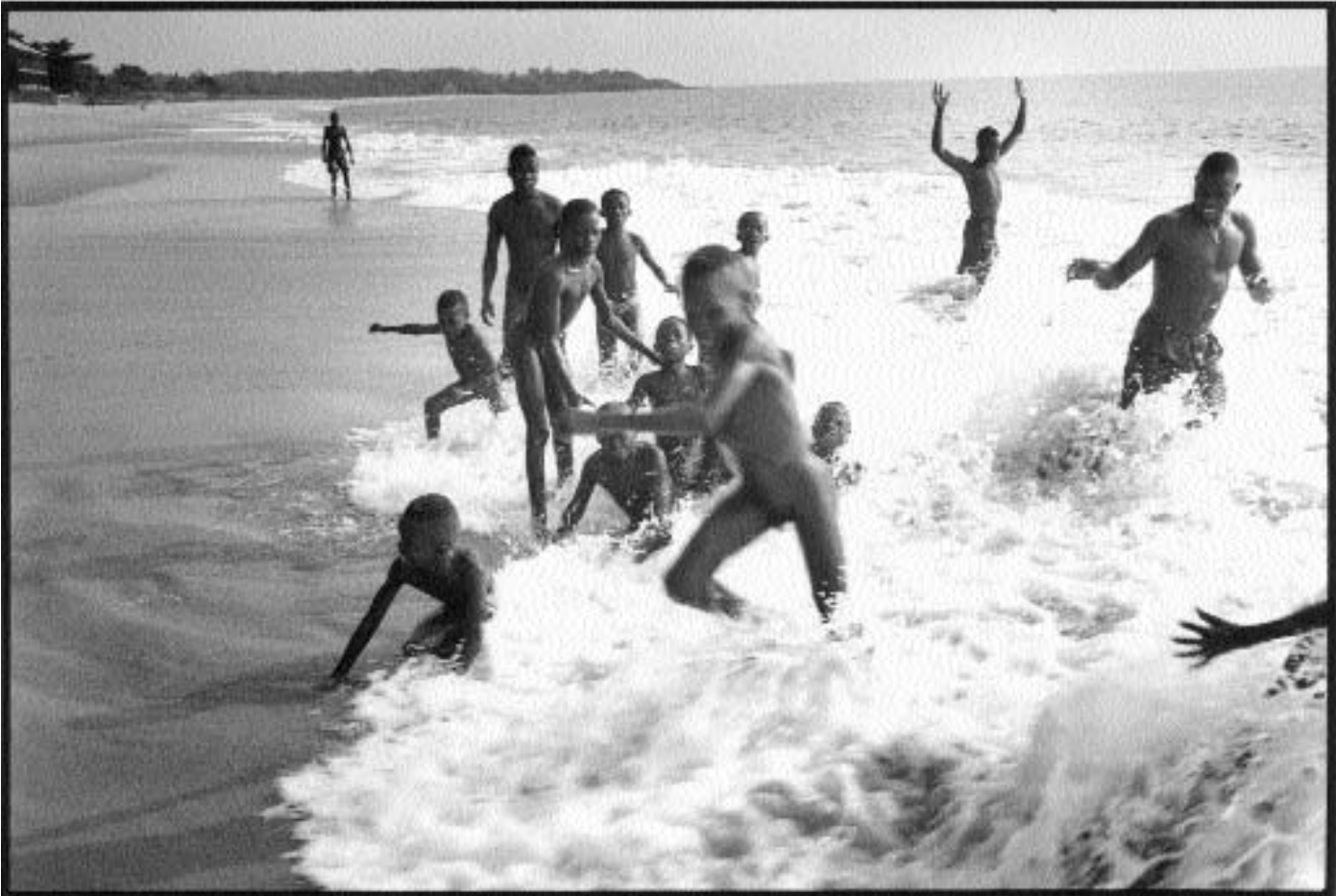
Fifteen-year-old "A.K." has been a Kamajoh for four years and has been on patrol in the bush more times than he can count. A.K. recalls that his "best time" was when he and other villagers in Moyamba fought continuously for three days in successfully defending their village.



Captured by the RUF during an ambush enroute to Freetown in 1994, 18-year-old "K.A." recalls that she was separated from her family, brought to a camp in the jungle, and forced to marry the unit commander. Because she refused to "favor" him, she was regularly stripped, raped, and tied up in the corner of a room where she remained through the night after having buckets of cold water splashed over her. She was taught to clean and use weapons, raid villages, and forced to carry looted goods back to the rebel camp. After several years, K.A. was released and presently lives in a safe group home. Because her father died at an early age, her mother could not afford to send her to school. K.A. feels that, at 18, she's too old to begin her education, so she sells provisions (sodas and biscuits) from a kiosk.



Ex-combatant "J.K." lives in a safehouse in Freetown. He was a young boy when rebels attacked his village near the Liberian border. He was with his father in the market at the time and watched his father die in the crossfire. J.K. was taken by rebels who trained him to fight. After several years, his commander, "2F," abandoned him and others in their camp after they ran out of food. He left the camp and several months later was recaptured by a different group of rebels. J.K. fought for a total of seven years. He would like to learn carpentry.



Former child combatants at the beach in Lakka Town.

{ A n g o l a }

After achieving independence from Portugal in 1975, Angola entered a 16-year civil war between FMLA (the government forces) and UNITA (rebel forces). Of the total population of 10.5 million, more than 3 million people were either displaced or directly affected by the war. An estimated 100,000 children were orphaned, and large numbers of children suffered the shock of attack, displacement, separation from parents, destruction of home, hunger, inadequate health care, and often crippling land mine-related accidents. Nearly 10,000 children were forced to become soldiers.

In the past year, tensions have risen, and fighting has begun again between the government and rebel forces. Current estimates are that a total of 800,000 people have been displaced.

USAID, through the Christian Children's Fund (CCF), has helped reintegrate more than 300,000 traumatized children into communities in eight provinces in Angola through a variety of community organizations, non-governmental organizations, and government ministries. USAID-funded projects have provided training and follow-up guidance to 4,000 adults who help children come to terms with their war experiences.

USAID also funds the Save the Children Fund of the United Kingdom (SCF-UK) in Angola. Given the years of conflict, a large number of children have become separated from their parents. USAID and Save the Children work with the Government of Angola to help document, trace, and reunite children with their families and to discourage the institutionalization of these children. NGOs, community organizations, and churches all serve as partners in reuniting families.

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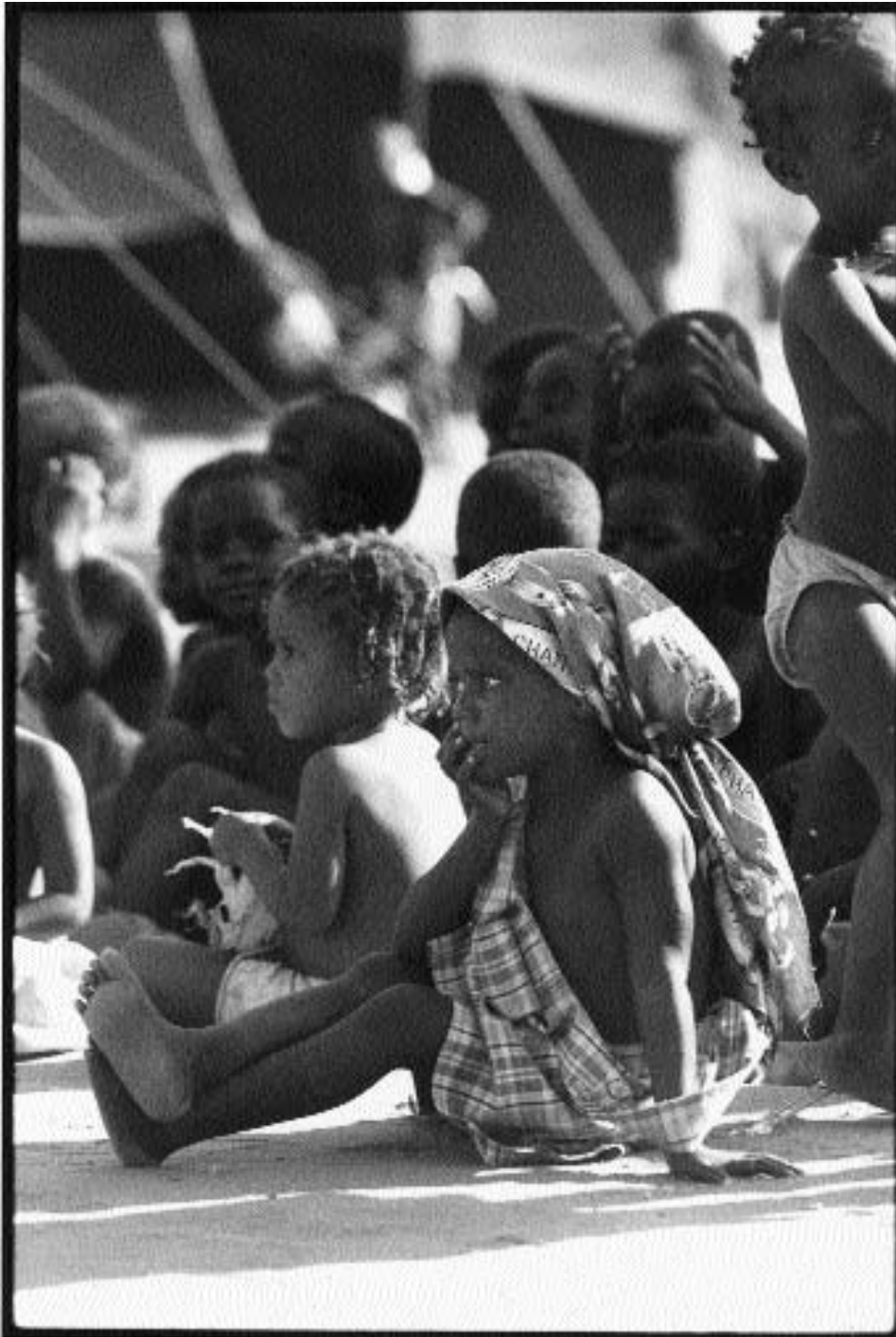


Wall murals outside military hospital, Luanda. (>)

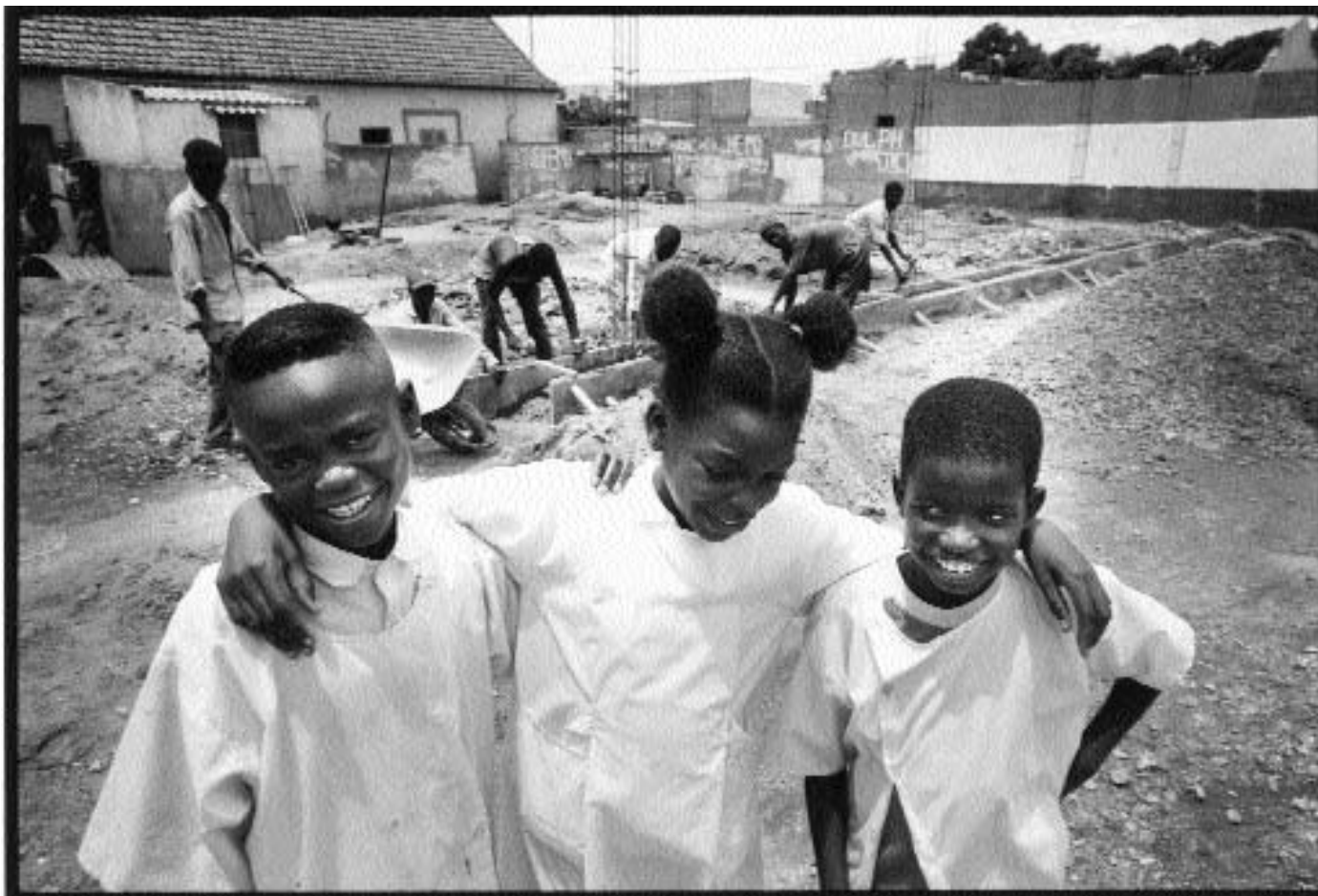


Land mine victim begging in traffic,
Central Luanda.





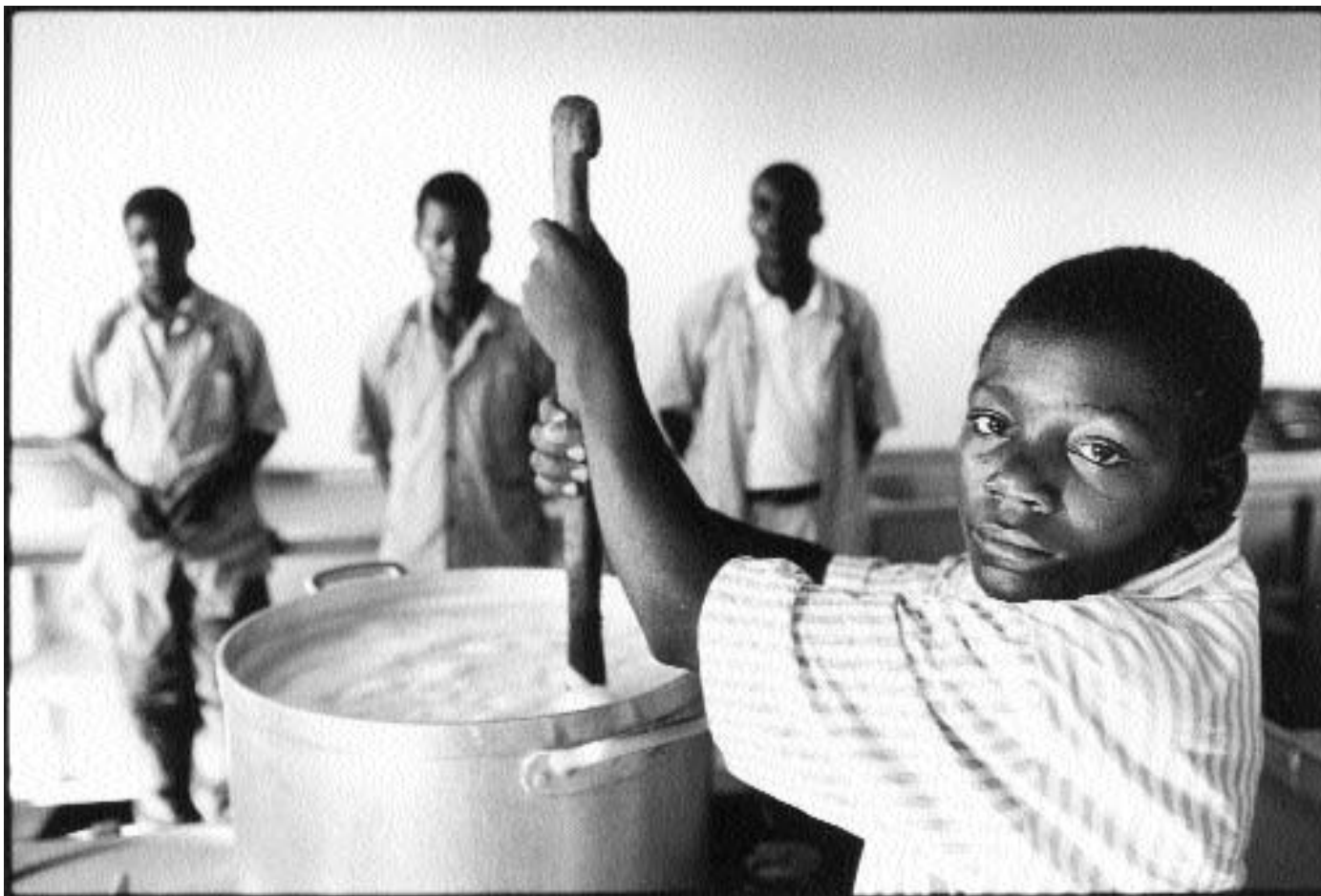
Young displaced girl during activities
at Viana.



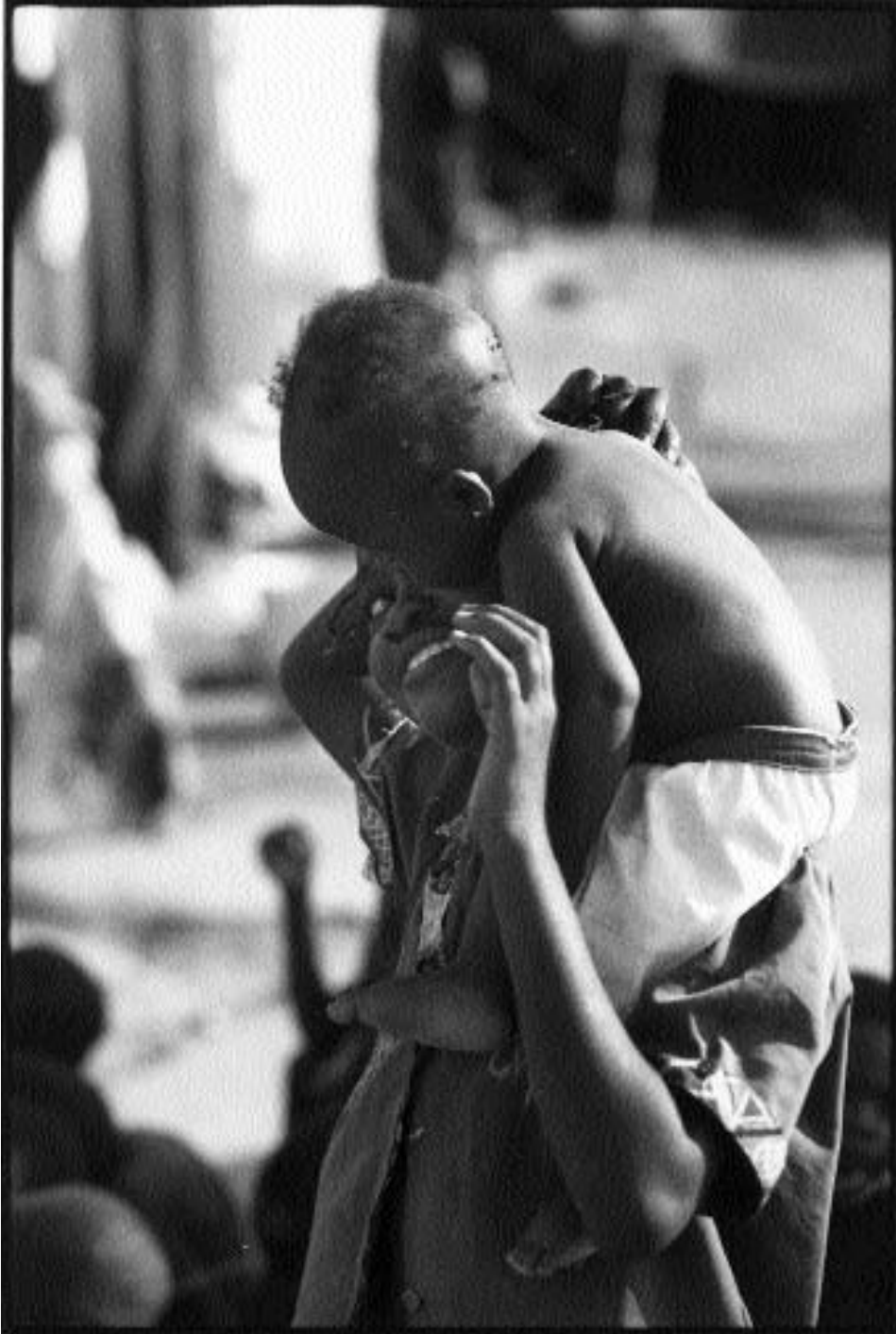
Young war-displaced students at School No. 419, on the outskirts of Luanda, where USAID is funding the construction of additional classrooms.



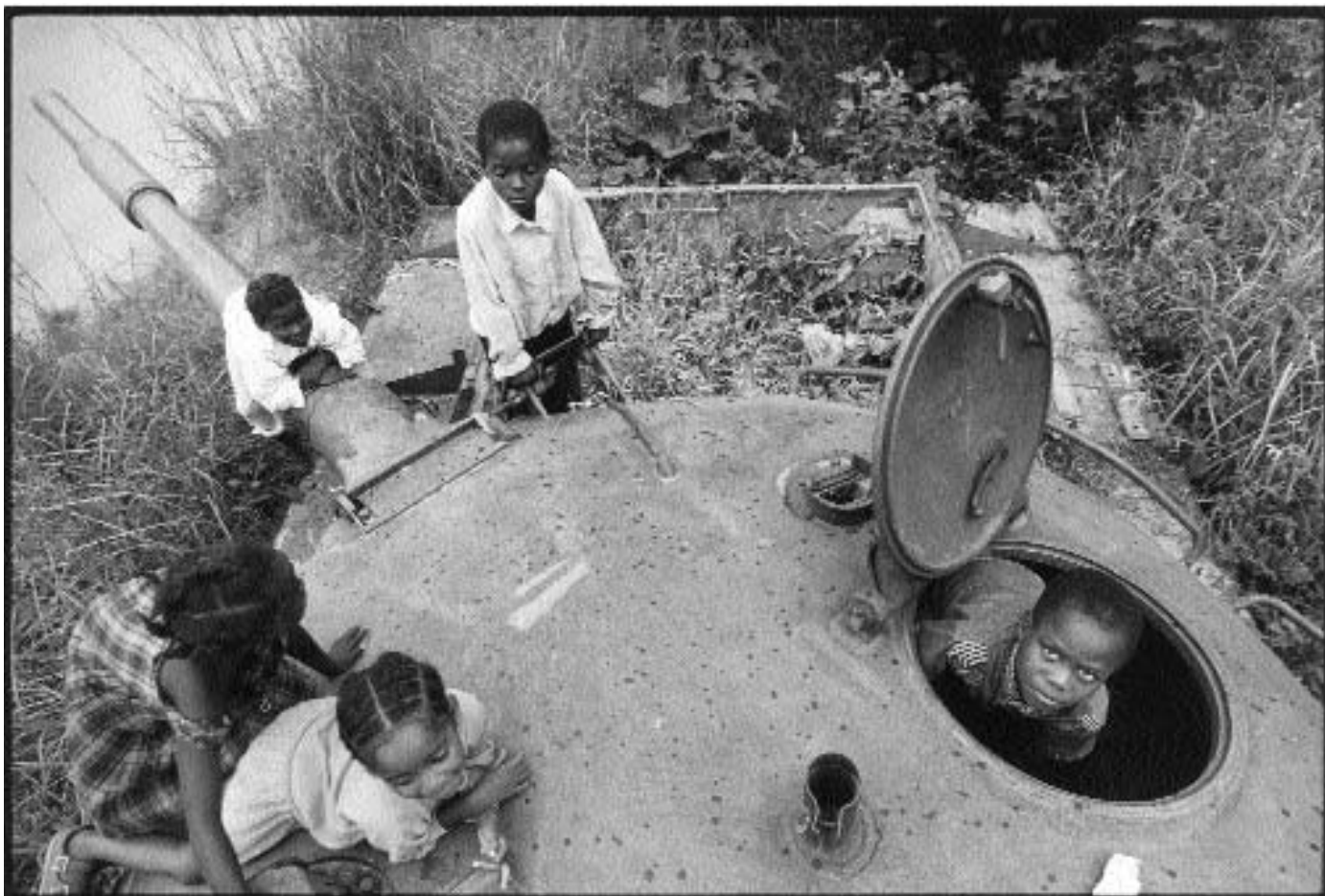
Antonica Moises cares for 7-month-old John Alberto, whose parents were displaced from Malange Province and are unable to care for him.



USAID-financed Save the Children Fund-UK supports tracing and reunification of displaced children at the Benfica Center outside Luanda. Fifteen-year-old "O.A.," when asked what he remembers from before arriving at the center, responds with the word "war." He doesn't know where his parents are. He spends his spare time in the kitchen at Benfica, learning to cook, and plans to be a schoolteacher when he grows up.



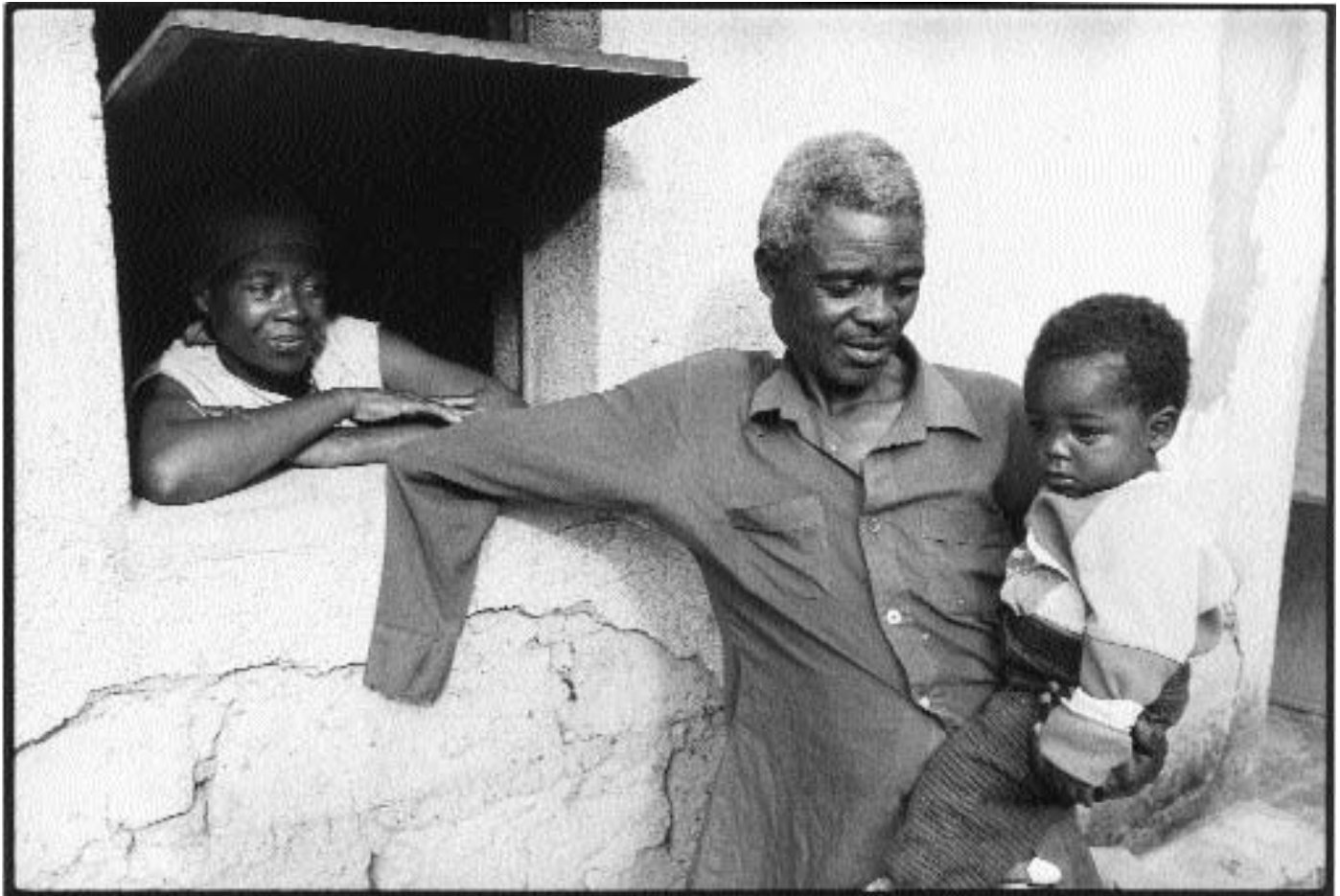
Young mother and child at Viana
displaced center.



Local children play on an abandoned tank adjacent to SCF-UK's Huambo office.



Young woman with child outside
SCF-UK center.



Grandparents Elularia Nambundo (left) and Domingo Gustino care for their grandson, David, whose father disappeared during the war and whose mother died of malaria when David was 4 days old.



Wall mural depicting a typical village, Huambo, Angola.

{ L i b e r i a }

Seven years of war have had a devastating impact on children and youth in Liberia. Fifty-five percent of Liberia's estimated population of 2.9 million are children under the age of 17. These children's lives have been dominated by violence, hunger, and homelessness. As a result of the war, children have been displaced, separated from their families, or orphaned. Many have become subject to forced recruitment, child labor, and child prostitution. Others have moved onto the streets. Without any educational opportunities, many have turned to drugs and crime.

A significant number of children actively participated in the war. An estimated 5,000 — 15 percent — of the approximately 33,000 combatants were child soldiers. During the disarmament and demobilization exercise in 1996–97, a total of 4,306 child combatants were demobilized. Although the majority of these children went back to their communities, about 20 percent had to be temporarily placed in transit homes while family tracing and alternative placements were pursued. It has since surfaced that an even larger number of children who participated in the war were never formally demobilized.

USAID's War Affected Youth Support (WAYS) program, implemented by UNICEF, strives to provide for the reintegration into civil society of Liberian children, including demobilized child soldiers and displaced youths. Such reintegration is a long-term process requiring programs for the psychosocial and physical rehabilitation of children and the provision of educational and training opportunities. The program also involves a tracing component to assist reuniting targeted children with their families. Through USAID funding, 22 centers in Liberia have been established to facilitate the delivery of vocational and literacy training, counseling, and tracing services. To date, a total of 2,700 war-affected youths have completed the program, and 3,620 are enrolled in the program.

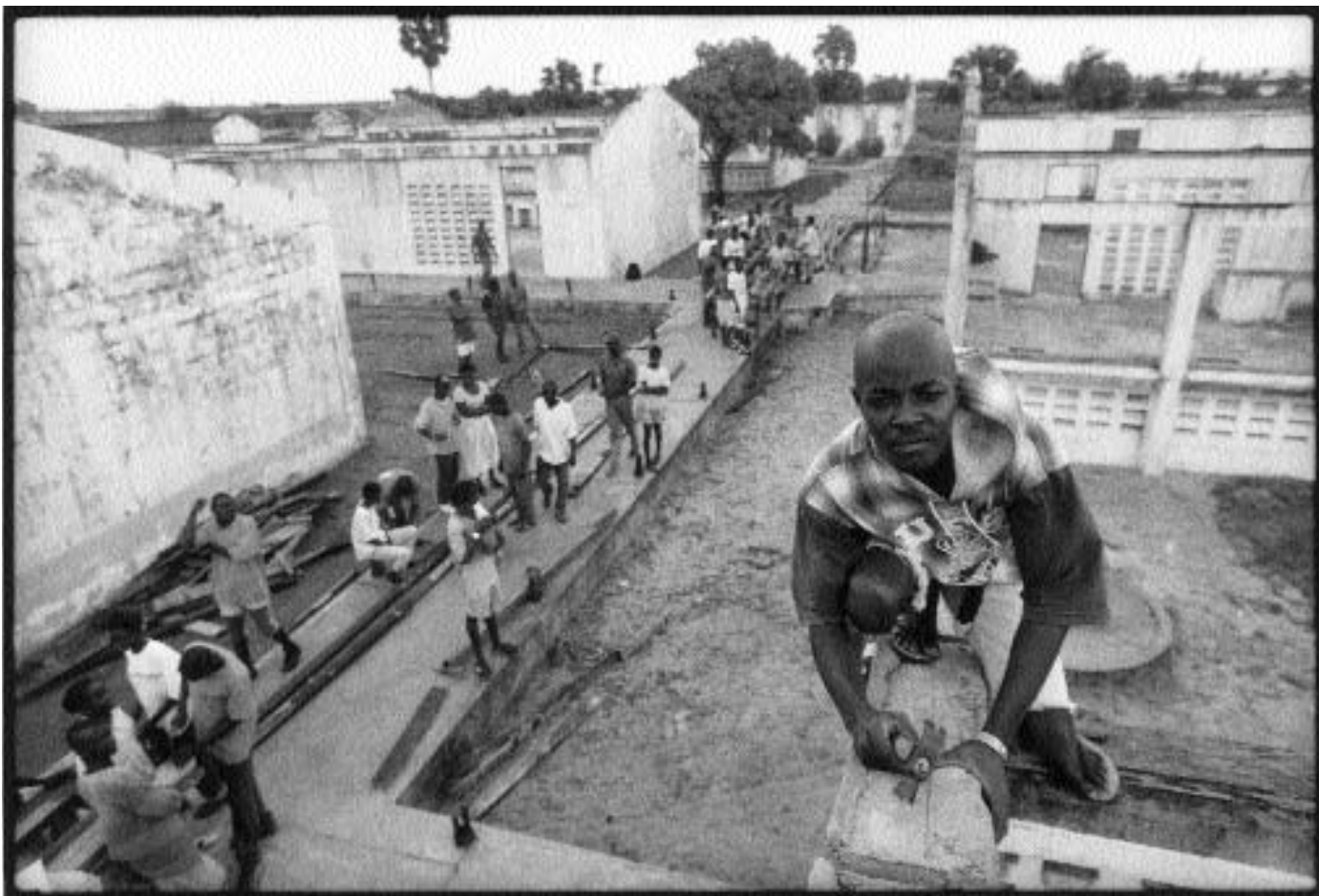
USAID has funded 22 centers in Liberia that have served to provide vocational training, literacy, and counseling services for approximately 3,000 war-affected youth.



A former child fighter, "F.W." is currently participating in one of 22 USAID-supported reintegration projects throughout Liberia. After he put down his weapon, F.W. and his family returned to southwestern Liberia and took part in a project where F.W. is training to become a blacksmith. He realizes that he gained nothing from being a fighter and now wishes to acquire skills to do something productive with his life.



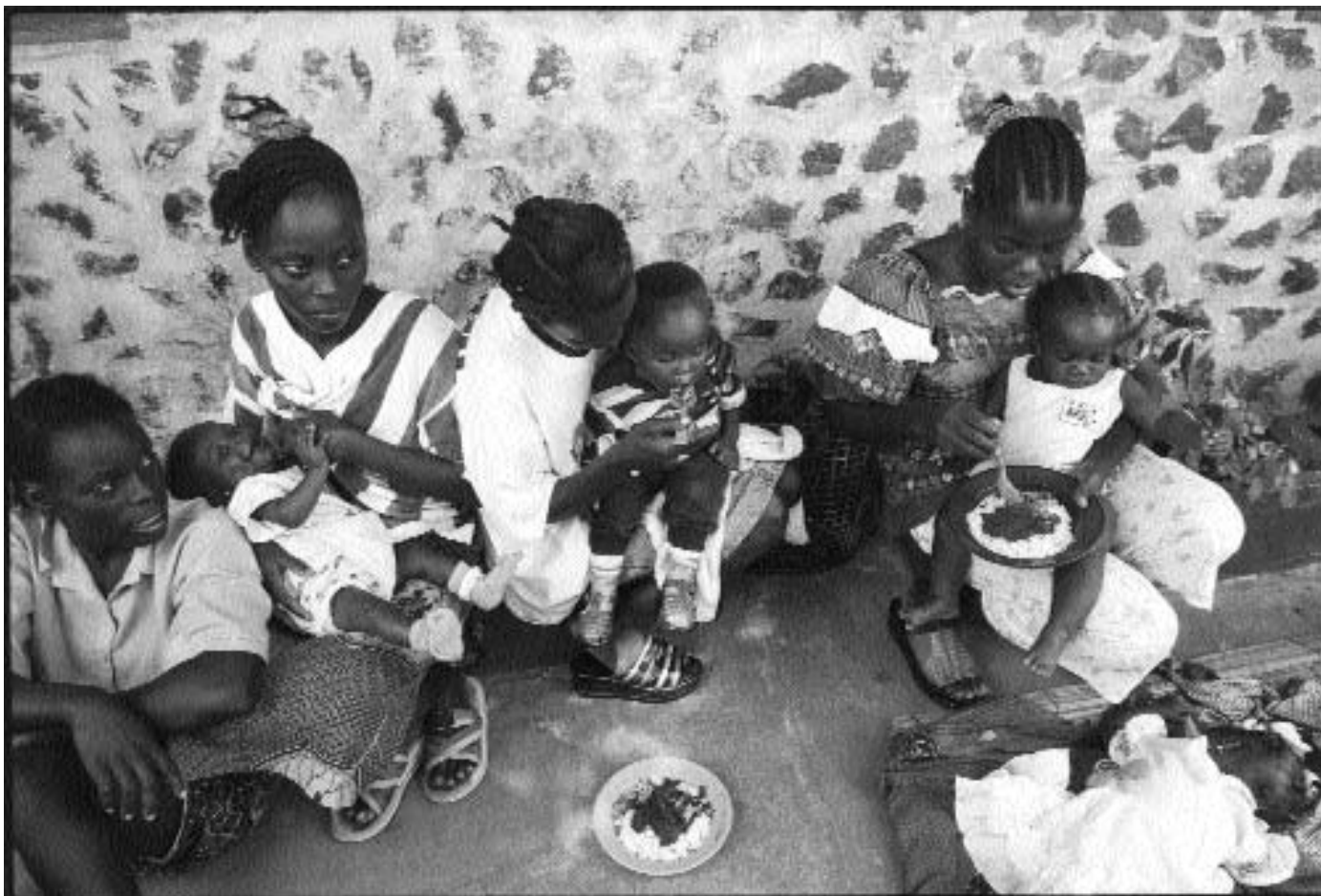
The youngest of 10 children, "T.L." has missed out on both primary and high school education as a result of war in her homeland. After many years of displacement, she has recently returned to Tubmanburg. Because their home was destroyed during the fighting, she has been living in a hut with members of her family who lack the means to rebuild their home. While she is eager to learn, she realizes that she will not be able to go to regular school, because her parents cannot afford the school fees charged in public schools (to pay teacher salaries). For T.L and the approximately 3,600 youths enrolled, the USAID project is the only educational opportunity in post-war Liberia.



Youths at USAID's WAYS project in Harper are learning trades firsthand as they assist in the renovation of the war-destroyed high school campus that will house the training project during the rainy season. After participating in the looting and destruction of villages and towns during the war, the direct contribution of these former child soldiers in rebuilding their communities is an integral part of the reconciliation and reintegration process.



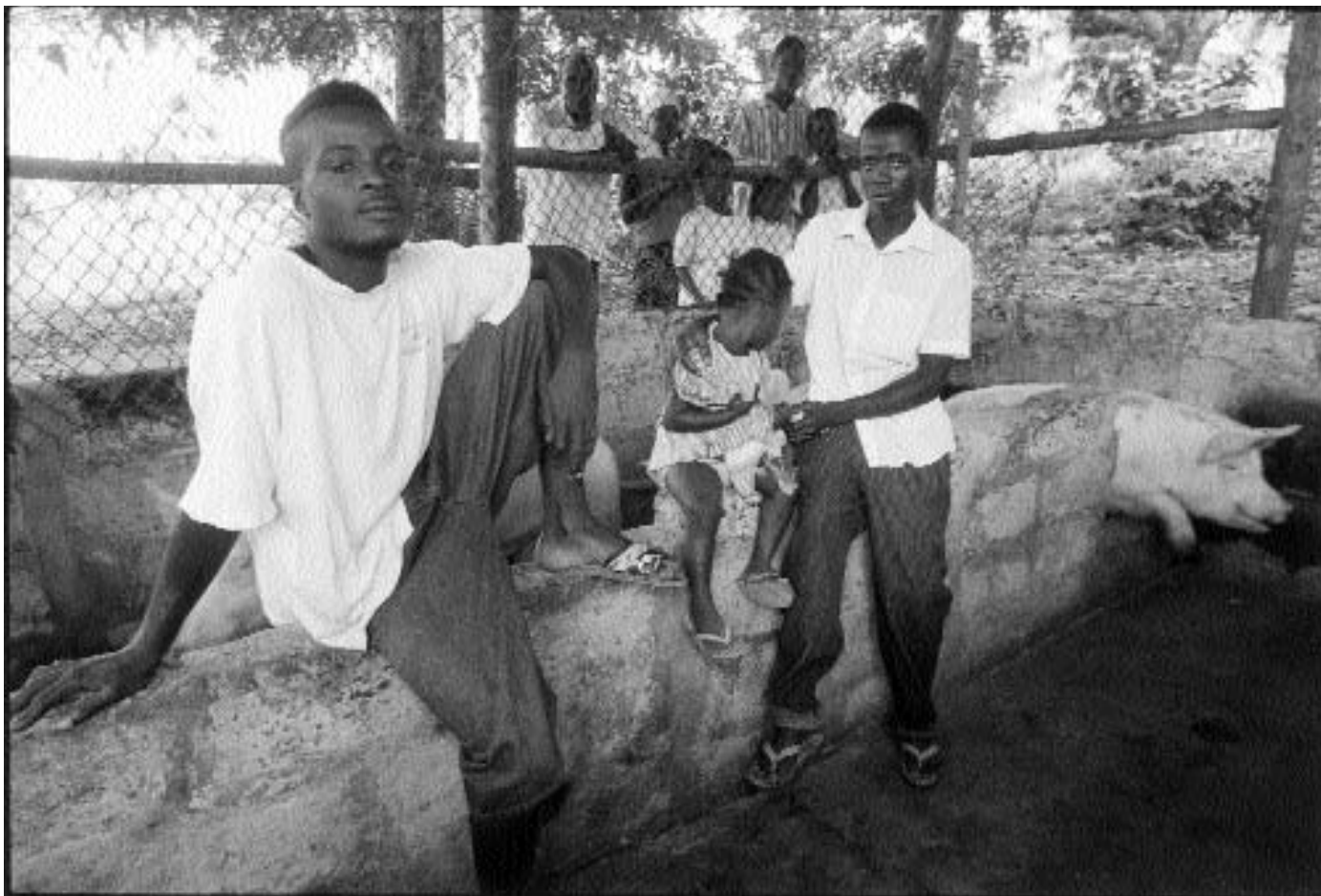
"E.," a former fighter, is shown here with his foster mother at a WAYS project site in Buchanan. E. came to the WAYS project after attempts to trace and reunify him with his family were not successful. While E. receives training and counseling, aid workers continue to try to locate his family in his home community to prepare for his return.



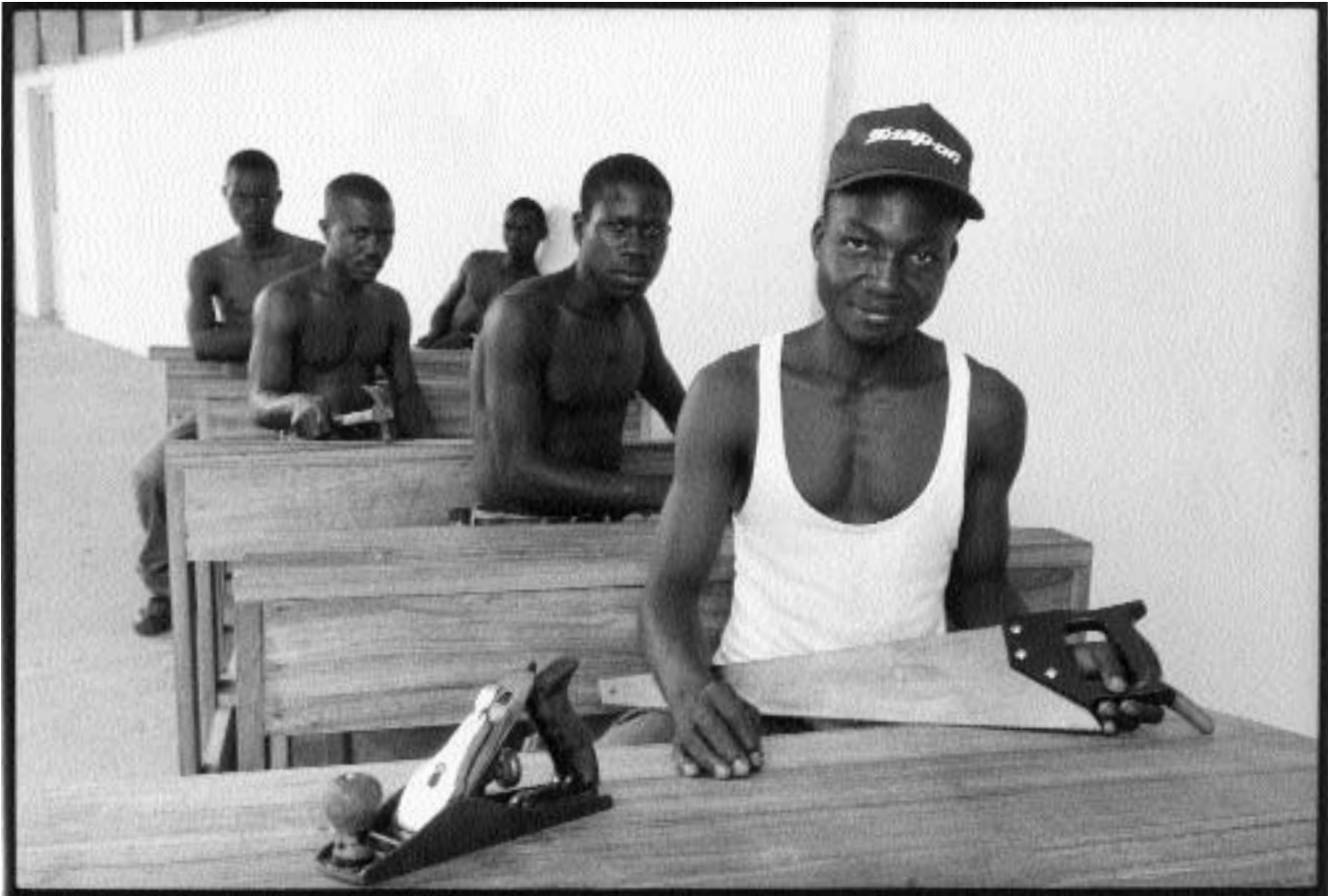
At a temporary home for single teenage mothers and their babies in Buchanan, former “rebel wives” and other girls who have to fend for themselves and their babies are feeding their infants. While in residence at the USAID-funded WAYS home, the mothers are taught basic child and health care practices. They also learn a trade to enable them to make a living after they leave the home. At the end of their four-month stay at the WAYS home, the girls are placed in foster family homes and given a small start-up grant as part of a business group.



At the Buchanan Youth Training Center, a USAID-funded WAYS project, blacksmith students prepare their graduation masterpiece. The 55-gallon drums, which are used for water storage, will be evaluated by the trainers to determine whether the trainees are ready to graduate and go into business.



Two brothers — both former child fighters — who went through the WAYS program and have been reintegrated into their families, are in front of the family pig farm. Like many former child soldiers who joined the program after hearing about it through friends, the younger brother followed his older sibling's example. After graduation from the program's agriculture training, the boys received a basic toolkit and a few piglets as part of their reintegration package.



A group of carpentry graduates from the WAYS project in Monrovia pose with a sample of their finished products. To support the economic reintegration of the youths/graduates, UNICEF is facilitating contracts with various U.N. agencies and other international organizations — often the only contracting partners in the devastated post-war economy of Liberia. In this case, school desks were contracted to carpentry groups from various WAYS projects as part of a USAID-funded effort to revitalize elementary schools throughout Liberia via teacher training, providing school supplies and textbooks, and the renovation of the school facilities.

{ M o z a m b i q u e }

Mozambique endured a 12-year civil war from 1980 to 1992 between FRELIMO (government forces) and RENAMO (guerrilla forces). This war was infamous for its violence and brutality: 1 million of Mozambique's 16 million inhabitants were victims of the war, most of the casualties were inflicted upon civilians, and 5.5 million people were forced to leave their villages to seek refuge in towns, cities, and neighboring countries. More than 250,000 children are thought to have been separated from their families.

USAID supported Save the Children Federation, to help reunite families and children and to help in their readjustment to post-war life.

Activities were designed to complement local community and family efforts to promote children's social integration. This approach allowed USAID to contribute directly to the reintegration of more than 12,000 unaccompanied children and made the reunification of thousands of others possible between 1988 and 1995.

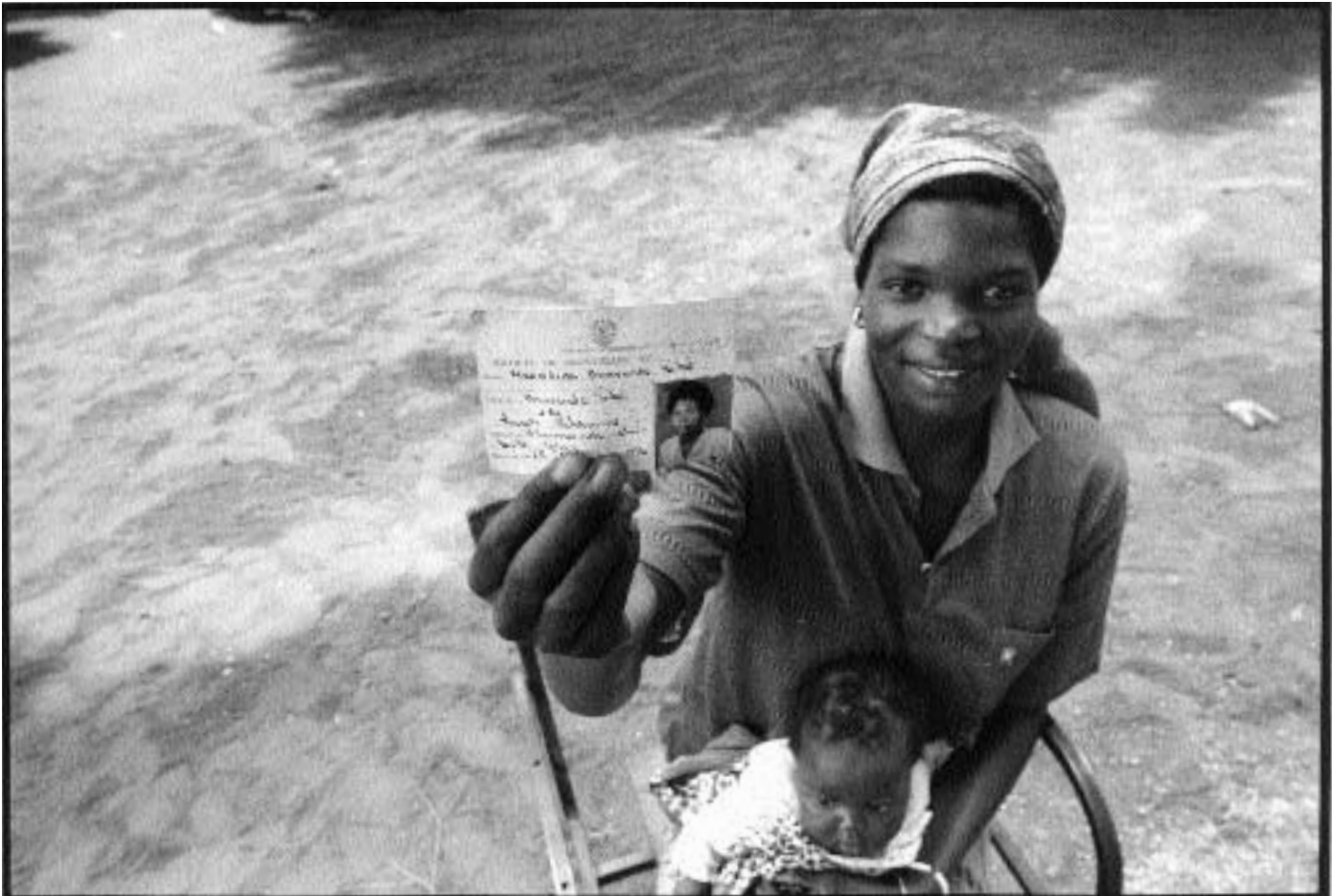
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Seventeen-year-old "M.A.S." was captured by RENAMO at the age of 10 and forced to fight for several years before escaping, after which his family was traced and he was reunified to his village of Josina Machel Island. He still has "very bad memories," but is learning to forget the past. He works in his village making bricks and delivering well water to homes.



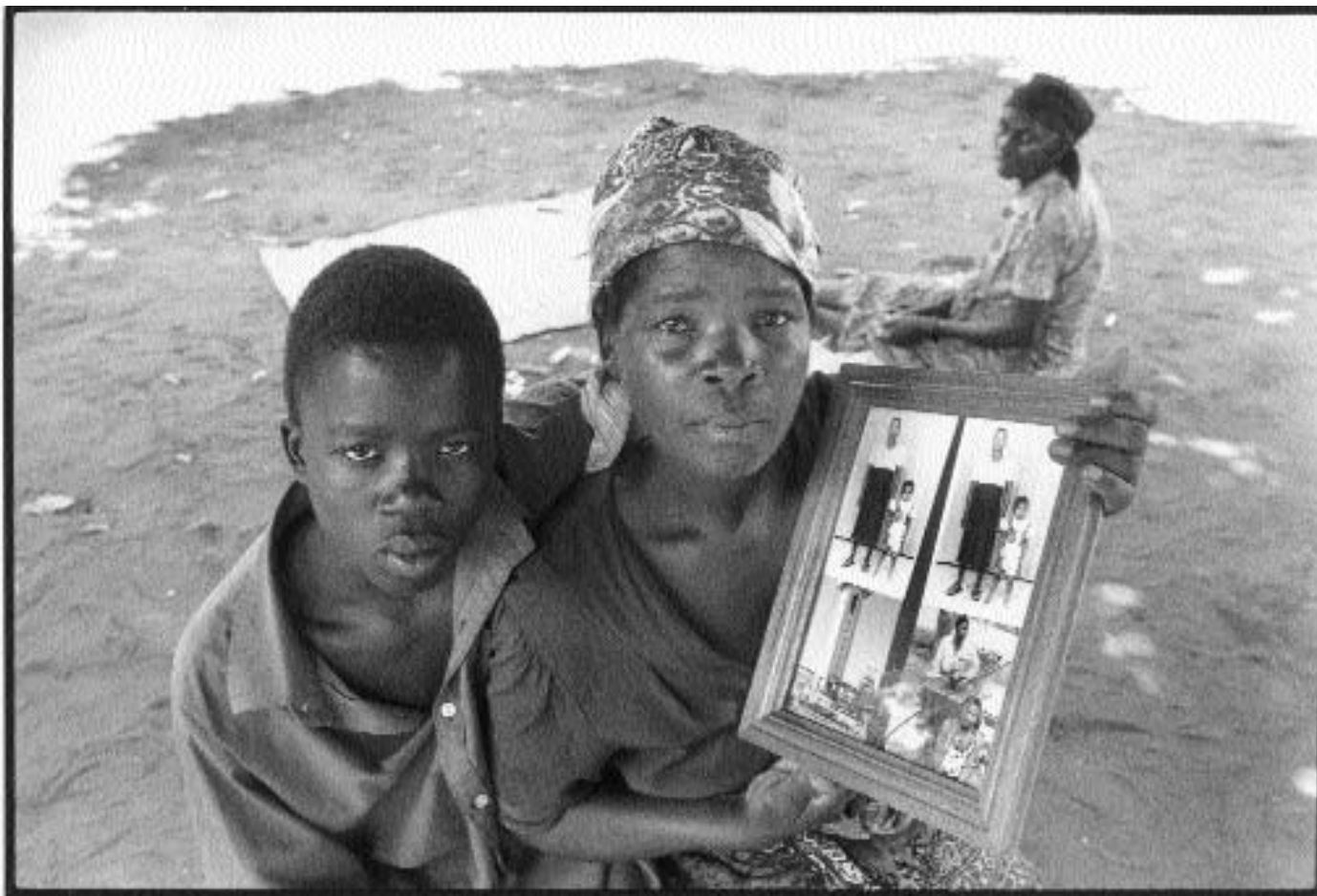
"F.J.M.," now 18 years old, was captured by RENAMO and eventually released. Under a USAID skills training program, she learned sewing in her village of Samora Machel.



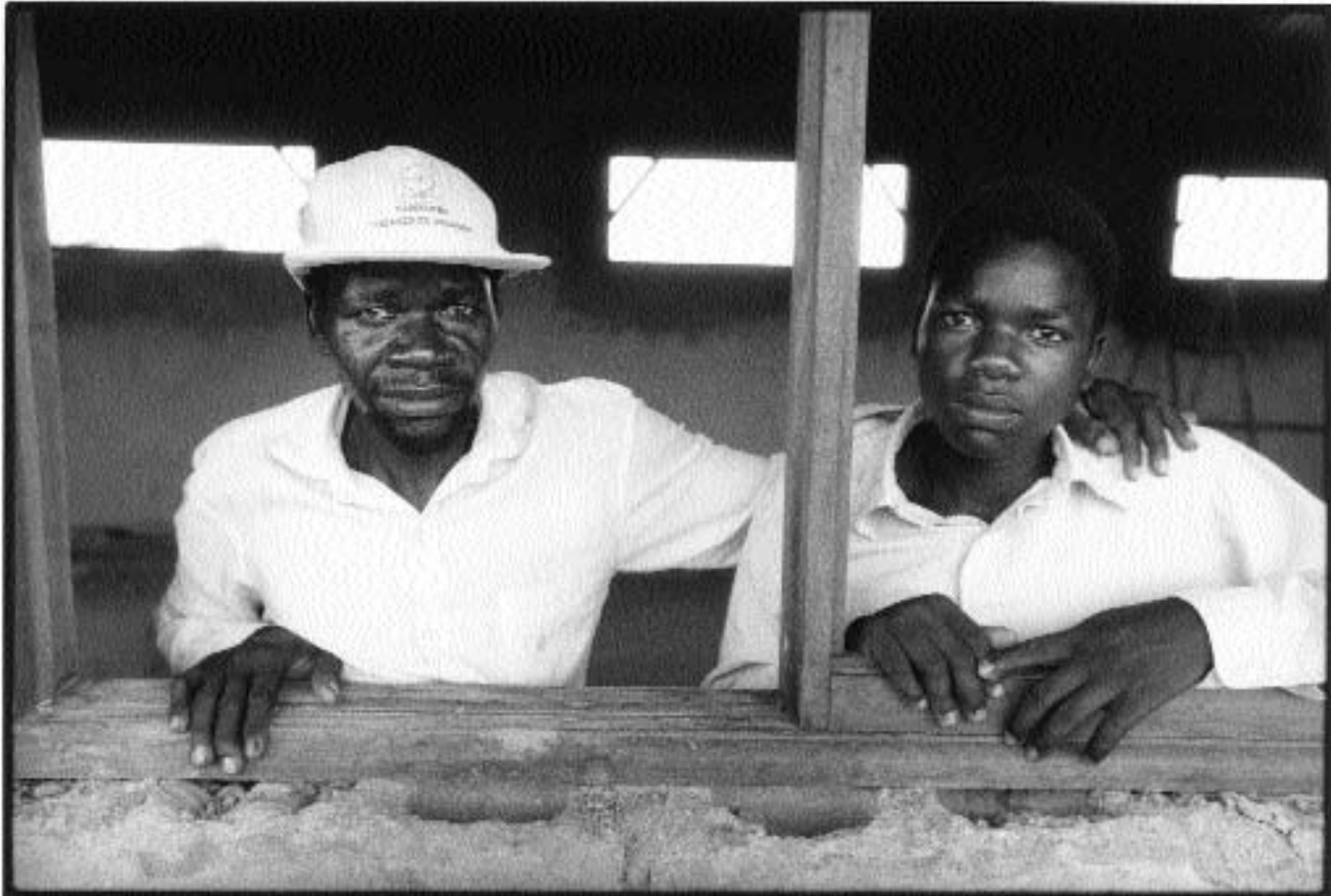
"A.A.S." was captured and forced by RENAMO to fight for two years from the age of 17. She has since returned to her village of Samora Machel, where she was issued an identification card upon entrance into the USAID/SCF training programs.



Twenty-two-year-old "R.A.N." was forced by RENAMO to fight for two years. He learned to make furniture and now owns his own shop in the market at Samora Machel, where he is "very busy every day."



Sixteen-year-old "G.A.C." was reunified with his family in Samora Machel village. His mother holds a photograph of her daughter who remains missing.



"D.T." and his 18-year-old son, D.C.T., were reunited when his family was traced with a photograph and he was brought to their doorstep. It was the first time they had seen him for several years. Father and son are currently working together with D.C.T.'s other brothers to build a house in their village of Josina Machel Island.

“When elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers.”

— African proverb

All Photographs © 1999 Martin Lueders

Through the years, from Bosnia to Rwanda, I've seen, heard, breathed the aftermath of man's brutality. This project confronted me with the worst of which we are capable. For the first time in my career, there were moments when, so overwhelmed, I wanted desperately to abandon my work and flee, to retreat to the safety of my own children. What kept me going was the strength of those who assisted me, particularly these children. Their determination and resilience are remarkable. Hope is theirs and because so, ours.

This body of work is dedicated to Eilidh, Jack and Callum, who are so seldom in my arms, so often in my thoughts and so permanent in my heart.

Martin Lueders

May 21, 1999



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